

COMMEMORATION AND TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS

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Introduction

My original research title was 'Imagination and Contemporary Art Practice'. As my research and creative practice evolved, I felt a more appropriate title would be 'Commemoration and Transitional Objects.'

The key question for me has been: How do I position myself in relation to my exterior physical world and the internal world of my psyche? In this report I aim to explore my response to this question, and investigate the commemorative and transitional nature of the artworks that have developed during the Doctorate Programme.

The report starts with the autobiographical context of my creative practice, reviewing my formative years at art school and my professional activities until the start of the Doctorate Programme as a part-time student in September 2008. In the main part of the report I discuss my creative practice, my theoretical enquiry and professional practice throughout the Doctorate Programme.

My initial research focused on theories of imagination whilst drawing on my previous research studies of psychotherapy when I worked and trained as a counsellor from 1998-2006. Key theorists on art, imagination, and memory have been: Richard Kearney, Geoffrey Batchen, Matthew Kieran, Ruth M.J.Byrne and Joan Gibbons.

As a consequence of this research I was inspired to interview contemporary artists Grayson Perry, Mark Currah, Mark Hampson, Lesley Logue and Susan Stockwell on the subject of imagination and its role in their creative practice.

In June 2011 I attended an International conference at the Royal College of Art entitled 'Imagining the Imagination' that provided new connections to my theoretical research. I began by reading Donald Winnicott's (1971) book *Playing and Reality* after hearing the artist Patricia Townsend talk at the conference about his theories of transitional objects and spaces in relation to her work. Winnicott's writings began to influence my theoretical research which is represented by the

change in title to 'Commemoration and Transitional Objects'. This new focus lead to further reading, in particular Sherrie Turkle's (2007) book *Evocative Objects: Things we think with*.

The majority of the work I have made during the Doctorate Programme has been ceramic plates. I start a piece of work by embarking on a process of cutting, pasting, sketching, scanning and manipulating groups of images. I use a variety of tools including computer software as well as more traditional media of pen and pencil. I continue to browse my array of collected information until I have an image that has a resonance to it. My working process seems haphazard and feels unconsciously random until I make a commitment to the idea and then I have to keep a focus on what I'm trying to achieve with my initial intention. At the same time I attempt to be open enough to allow my imagination and intuition to take hold, allowing the work to develop without my rational thought processes taking over. The work proceeds with this constant to and fro from rational thought and analysis to unconscious, intuitive choices that drive the image making process forward.

My strategy has been to use the aesthetics of crafted familiar decorative domestic objects to draw the viewer in and set up certain expectations which are then confounded or challenged as the work undermines the initial propositions, creating a tension between the visual language employed and the underlying content. These works are created in series so that I can investigate a range of themes including love, identity and notions of the 'self'. I have also included a chapter called 'creative mistakes' that documents works which have informed my practice but have not been fully developed during the Doctorate Programme.

Autobiographical Context

I was born in 1957 in Manchester. I started my degree at Sheffield Polytechnic in 1976 in the Fine Art department. During the second year I became increasingly interested in the work of Robert Rauschenberg. His combining of the photographic and hand drawn images of his environment and the energy in his work had a strong appeal for a 20 yr old with very little knowledge of art. My early attempts at making art exploited the work of other artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Albrecht Durer, Gianlorenzo Bernini, Thomas Gainsborough, Andy Warhol and David Hockney. By using this approach within screenprinting (*Fig 1*) I explored the history of art and started to develop my art practice.



Fig 1. Work from BA Degree show. 35x25ins, Screenprints, 1980.

Left to right *Marilyn Mongrel* and *Portrait of the Artist in an Ornate Gold Frame with Albrecht Durer*.

Inspired by my motivational teacher, Edward Mayor, I chose to do my thesis on Gianlorenzo Bernini; specifically on how Bernini and Antony Van Dyck portrayed Charles Ist. Bernini showed the image of a King whereas Van Dyck was preoccupied with the image of a man. This simple contrast illustrated that there was no right or wrong way of representation.

After my degree I studied at Chelsea School of Art for my MA in Printmaking. I gained a lot of knowledge technically within print mediums while at Chelsea. We did not have any theoretical or art history component in the course but I was exposed to artists such as Richard Long, Chuck Close, Anish Kapoor and Bill Woodrow. I was intrigued by Richard Long's use of the photograph as

documentation and Chuck Close's paintings that looked as if they might be photographs. I started making work at Chelsea inspired by Arnulf Rainer. My father had died the year before and looking back I feel Rainer's seemingly emotional intensity within his photographic and drawn self-portraits resonated with my feelings at that time. I later developed work that used the idea of different forms of visual representation of the same object and the traces that the objects made (Fig 2-3). This work was inspired in part by Joseph Kosuth's 'One and Three Chairs' (Fig 1. Appendix, page 75) and his approach to the relations between objects, definitions and images.

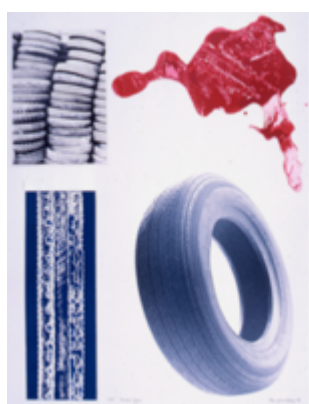


Fig 2. Work from MA Degree show, 30 x 40ins. 1981. *Bob's Tyre*.
 Fig 3. Work from MA Degree show, 24 x 30ins. 1981. *Football*.
 screenprint, photo etching and relief print, screenprint.



After leaving Chelsea in the autumn of 1981 I took a teaching assistants job at Sunderland Polytechnic. I quickly realised that this was not what I wanted at that stage of my life. I had been to the USA for a month traveling around before starting back at Sheffield for my 3rd year so I had a sense of what America could offer in terms of exposure to contemporary art. I wrote to many funding bodies to get financial support to go and at the same time I was starting to research photographers using 'non-silver' photographic techniques as I wanted to expand on ways to use photographic images within my work. I realised that the Fulbright award gave an opportunity to exchange knowledge between countries so I structured a proposal to visit American print workshops and to also work with a number of photographers using these techniques. I was awarded the Fulbright award in 1982 and headed for the United States. I bought a large format 10x8ins plate camera and an instamatic camera when I arrived and the first pieces of work I made were of

journeys across America (Fig 4). These works were inspired by Robert Frank's 'The Americans' and Ed Ruscha's 'Every Building on the Sunset Strip' (Fig 2. Appendix, page 75). Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida* (1980) made an impression on me at this time. What I took from this book was the idea of the unmediated photograph being the most profound type of photograph for him.



Fig 4. Palladium Print. 10x8ins, 1986. NYC Dock Yards



Fig 5. Mixed media, 1984, Letters Home.

New York City at the start of the eighties was dominated by neo-expressionism and questions of post modernism with artists such as Julian Schnabel, David Salle, Cindy Sherman, and Robert Mapplethorpe at the forefront. Artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer inspired me to think about the use of text within art works. I made a number of text works commenting on New York and the USA in the form of boxed 'letters home' inspired by Alistair Cooke's 'Letters from America' (Fig 5) I spent seven years in New York, from 1982-89, and in that time I taught at the State University of New York at Purchase, and at the Pratt Graphic's Center. I collaborated with Jon Cone, another Printmaker, and we printed and published editions of artists to show at Cone Editions gallery (Fig 3. Appendix, page 75, 76), situated at 560 Broadway in New York. We published limited editioned prints from 1986-9 by artists such as Norman Bluhm and Lester Johnson, who are thought of as second-generation abstract expressionist, and younger artists working in New York such as Carole Seborovski and Willy Heeks.

I returned to the UK in 1989, and I set up a studio in Walthamstow with Tim Mara, who was head of Printmaking at the Royal College of Art, and Martin Barrett who was head of Printmaking at the University of East London. London was changing

as an art scene and Charles Saatchi had opened his gallery in Swiss Cottage, which reminded me of the New York gallery spaces in its scale. In the early to mid nineties there was much debate about the impact of the digital revolution on photography with books such as W.J.Mitchell's (1992) *The Reconfigured Eye*. Mitchell talked about the post-photographic era and its consequences for the photographic image. My interests in the digital and photographic image lead me towards a different methodology for making work. I started to scan and manipulate images into the computer and printing them as large format digital photo-collages. I began with appropriated images from William Hogarth's satirical engravings and added contemporary newspaper and magazine images (Fig 6). Later on I wanted to develop what I felt was a less obvious referenced pictorial image and I used only my photographs in a series entitled *Paradox Cemetery* (Fig 7) which dealt with the manipulation of apparently opposing ideas through a constructed reality inspired in part by the work and writings of Jeff Wall. I undertook a 'Computer into Print' two-year residency at Staffordshire Polytechnic from 1989-90. I also taught at the Royal college of Art in the Printmaking and Photography departments from 1992-96.



Fig 6. *Conflicting Elements*. Diptych, Digital ink jet print, 8 x 3.5ft. 1994.



Fig 7. *Sky House* Digital ink jet print from the series *Paradox Cemetery*, 12 x 3.5ft. 1997.

In 1998 I started a counselling course at a centre for humanistic psychology called Spectrum in north London. I originally became interested in counselling and psychotherapy after attending a two-day course delivered by Staffordshire University in 1997 as part of a staff development course. This experience sparked my interest in how my beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are formed and how these have impacted on my art practice. As a result my work started to become more personal in its subject matter and I started to be informed by photographs from my family album, becoming aware of the psychological landscape of my life. I was also looking at the work of Bill Viola (1995) and his writings about his art practice from his book *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House, writings 1973-1994*.

For an exhibition I curated in 1998 at the Real gallery in New York called 'Digital Collaborations' I asked Bill Jones (1998) to write an essay for the catalogue. His essay titled *The Painted Photograph* opened up for me new possibilities through digital media when he states:

While muting the truth-telling objectivity of the photographic document, digital media makes the photographic images potentially manipulable and thus handmade. The challenge, therefore, is to find the surrogate for the hand in the new process which combines aspects of painting, drawing, and photography (Jones, 1988).

Later in the year for an exhibition at the East London gallery in 1998 I decided to take photographs in Trafalgar Square at night. The idea of Trafalgar Square as a place of national protest and celebration appealed to me. The pieces used a combination of positive and negative imagery with the intention of creating a work that appears familiar and yet also as if something is out of place, a disruption, a complication in the reading of the image. The images were juxtaposed besides large flat areas of colour. I was thinking of the works in the *Rothko chapel* (Fig 4. Appendix, page 76) in Texas and Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* (Fig 5. Appendix, page 76). I also chose to frame the images (10ft x 5ft) in large ornate gold frames to question the idea of reverence and historical readings of representation (Fig 8).



Fig 8. *For use on Fires*. Digital Ink Jet prints, each panel 10x5ft, 1998.

In 2001 I sold my studio, which I had worked in for 12 yrs, and moved to a new location. I needed to clear out and make space but couldn't bring myself to dispose of my art works completely. I made an urn as a receptacle for the ashes of works that I decided to say goodbye to but couldn't part with completely. What appealed to me was the manufacture of a vessel that could represent some kind of personal shrine, commemorating my history, my personal interior landscape made as metaphor through mapping (Fig 9).



Fig 9. *Eric's World Ceramic Urn*, 18ins high, 2004.

I was reading Suzie Gablik's (1998) *Conversations before the end of time*. The book was full of interviews with artists, writers and philosophers asking questions about the role of art in an age of accelerating social change and uncertainty. In the book Ellen Dissanayake states 'In traditional societies, "art for life's sake," not "art

for art's sake" is the rule'. The resulting work I made was a short looped film of an animated shadow that appeared for several seconds each morning in my bathroom and then disappeared. The idea that it only existed for a short while and then did not exist without the exact alignment of the sun and water and the ability of the photographic image to capture it appealed to me. I wanted to make fragile and fleeting moments visible, the insignificant significant.

In 2005 I ran a 5-day 'Art Community Group' workshop, with Grayson and Philippa Perry, for a mixed group of staff and students at the University of East London. This group of 20 people explored the idea of how your personal creative process (what forms your beliefs as an artist) informs your creative practice. Around the same time of the 'Art Community Group' I started to make a set of commemorative plates (Fig 10). I have always thought that each family has its own secrets, regrets, myths, public and private faces. I thought about the emotional events in my life that stand out and how these events have influenced my beliefs and my attitudes. It was an attempt to look at my Family Album and its histories and re-examine the photographic images and meanings within them. Influenced by Dissanayake's statement I thought of these objects not for a gallery space but located in a personal domestic setting, The Family Album opened wide.



Fig 10. Ceramic commemorative plates, 10x10ins. 2005.

In 2006 I was asked to participate in a show at the William Morris gallery called 'New News from Nowhere'. The exhibition was a response to Morris's (1890) book *News from Nowhere*. I was interested in exploring the idea of how people are creative in their daily lives. I wondered if any part of Morris's romanticised utopian world exists in some shape or form in the modern world (Fig

11). From 2004 to the present time I have worked at the same studio as my friend Grayson Perry, who had originally shown me how to make the ceramic urn. Our conversations on art, craft, the gallery system, fame, public art, spirituality, creativity and therapy have helped inform and influence my work on the doctorate programme.



Fig 11. Ceramic Pots for exhibition at William Morris Gallery, 2006.

Theory and Creative Practice – Introduction

Two of the key influences on my practice during the Doctorate Programme have been the assimilation of my past experiences being a client and practitioner within a therapeutic context, and the reassessment of my methodologies in making and researching within my practice.

I trained and worked as a counsellor from 1998-2006. It introduced me to an unrecognised psychological landscape that had always been present. I had not articulated this psychological landscape in words, or fully acknowledged its potential as a component within my art practice.

It was not until the making of an urn, for the ashes of cremated artworks (Fig 9), and a series of family commemorative plates (Fig 10), that the absorption of the theories and experiences of psychotherapy started to be revealed in the content of the artwork. I started to consider theories such as projection and transference, that examine personal beliefs, behaviours, emotions and thoughts.

The theory of projection was developed by Sigmund Freud and further refined by his daughter Anna Freud. It is described as:

A psychological defence mechanism...unwittingly attributing one's own traits, attitudes, sentiments, emotions, or subjective processes to others...Thus, projection involves imagining or projecting the belief that others originate those feelings (English and English, 1974, p. 413).

Transference was first described by Sigmund Freud as:

A phenomenon in psychoanalysis characterised by unconscious redirection of feelings from one person to another. One definition of transference is 'the inappropriate repetition in the present of a relationship that was important in a person's childhood (Kapelovitz, 1977, p 66).

These psychoanalytical theories mine the everyday and the familiar for broader and deeper layers of meanings that can often lead to the uncovering of less acceptable or acknowledged parts of the psyche.

The content within the urn and family commemorative plates started as an initial investigation into my personal history, looking at memories elicited by personal photographs. Liz Wells describes family photographs that contain memories for the viewer as:

the tension between an ideal image and the ambivalence of lived experience...the uncertain borderline between fantasy and memory (Wells, 1997, p. 142).

The content of the work has developed from objects that investigate the commemoration of personal histories, to objects commemorating the recognition of beliefs and behaviours.

Two key insights I gained from psychotherapy are the ideas of self-observation and personal stories. Socrates said that '*The unexamined life is not worth living*' (Baggini, 2005). I don't believe this statement but I would support the idea that an examined life can be enriching.

Self-observation examines the observance of oneself from a distance, without judgement. This allows you to be an eyewitness, acting as a monitor to your behaviours, thoughts and feelings. The aim of self-observation is to increase self-awareness of how you think, feel and act. This is a constant work in progress, similar to creating artworks and the process of research methodologies.

Personal stories/narratives help you to become aware of how we talk to ourselves and what is the narrative we have created in order to reflect. By becoming aware of your personal narrative you can intervene in the story, rewriting the elements that do not work, or you would like to improve. My friend and Psychotherapist, Philippa Perry (2012), recounts a story in her book, *How to stay sane*. This story is about a salesman who gets about 50 rejections before he gets

each sale. The way he deals with this rejection is to think that each rejection he gets means he is closer to the next sale. Philippa tells this story to one of her clients Sophie, who is a 55yr old women who has just finished a BA Fine Art degree course. Sophie believes she is '*washed up*' and '*It's a young persons world*'. Sophie laughs at the salesman's story and informs Philippa she wants to apply for an artists residency programme. On returning for another therapy session some months later she informs Philippa that it only took her 17 attempts before getting accepted on to a residency programme. This way of talking to her self and re-telling her story allowed her to approach how she looked at her world differently.

My story in this context is that I told myself, prior to the doctorate, that I could make my artwork without regard for the thoroughness of research and the time needed for using my imagination. Working during the doctorate has affirmed that I cannot tell myself that story. This new story has affected my methodology. What has developed significantly over the doctorate programme is the amount of time I dedicate to looking at, reading about and making artworks. I have given myself the permission to explore areas of research that might remain just investigations. I have given myself time for my imagination to make connections and link together all of the elements that inform my art practice. Grayson Perry states, when commenting on the use of his imagination:

I love the idea from 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance' about the little furry creatures coming out of the forest into the clearing. The first one comes out and all the others are looking to see how you are going to treat it before they come out. So one thing I've learnt about my imagination is that if an idea is unfamiliar to me I have to be tolerant of it being sad, kitsch, bad, or un-cool. I have to allow negative thoughts or the negative labels I put on those thoughts to exist, then I let the furry creatures in! (Perry, 2009).

When I started the Doctorate Programme in 2009 I began by making a series of 50cm diameter ceramic plates (*Fig 12*). I had initially thought they would be singular objects without specific themes linking them. I wanted to investigate an array of ideas surrounding belief systems inherent within the structures of a wider culture and my personal identity. I thought that this way of producing work would have an energy that would stimulate the making and thinking, and keep the production lively and interesting for me, the maker. I had chosen an eclectic mix of topics of existential anxiety, personal psychology, love, cultural paradox and sex to begin with. I made the first five plates for my end of year doctorate exhibition in June 2009 and then a further five plates for an exhibition at the Silas Marder Gallery in New York in November 2009 (*Fig 13*).

This first group of plates used my version of a font taken from chap-prints (*Fig 14*). The text in chap-prints is scored into the woodblocks, like a carving into a tree. I wanted to use this font to echo folk art, to look handmade, but also to shape decorative pattern on the plate. A non-confrontational crafted object that could reveal hidden, possibly darker secrets.

I will now discuss each plate from my first Doctorate Showcase exhibition (2009), and reflect on my thought process when making these objects.

This first group started with the plate, *This is proper porn* (*Fig 6. Appendix, page 77*). It evolved from over hearing students at the University talk about watching on-line porn. I started to think about what new fetishist behaviours might accompany this consumption of pornographic images. Maybe the turn on for this generation will be the sound of a computer firing up! I thought about what my first experiences of porn were and how that affected my sexuality and my relationships. A friend had given me a bag of 50 black and white 1950-60s porn stills when I was a student at Chelsea School of Art. I had always wanted to use them in a project and this seemed like a good way to make use of them. Instead of an image on a plate commemorating the London Bridge or the inauguration of the Manchester ship canal, it was an image from 1960s porn.



Fig 12. End of Year Doctorate Showcase 2009. Five Ceramic Plates. 50 x 50 cm each. 2009.
 Bottom to top. *This is proper porn. What is man. Love is really unpredictable. Being alone with your thoughts is not fun.*
Home Sweet Home.

In *What is man* (Fig 7. Appendix, page 78) I chose to draw a baby on a leaf evoking a biblical story or a Tarzen like fable of a child growing up in the wild. Will it survive or will it die? I was asking myself at the start of the doctorate whether I could survive this new journey examining my art practice.

Love is really unpredictable (Fig 8. Appendix, page 79). This plate developed from thinking about the difficulty of being able to give love and receive love back without expectations. I chose Adam and Eve as hairy wild people looking like they might be a bit drunk, arguing outside a pub, a 'he said she said' scenario taking place.

Being alone with your thoughts is no fun (Fig 9. Appendix page, 80). This came from the idea that the more you internalise and talk to yourself the greater the chance the story you tell yourself becomes distorted. A friend once said to me 'every time you have a conversation with yourself make sure you have one with your partner.' Good advice for a healthy relationship.

The final plate in this group was called *Home sweet home* (Fig 10. Appendix page, 81). It developed from the idea of fear. Of what is going to happen, rather than the experience of what is actually happening. It is an image of an Englishman's castle, the cute thatched roofed home with a log fire, but now covered with video surveillance and alarms. On a personal note, I was also thinking about a loss of innocence, a longing for another time in my past when I was not so fearful.



Fig 13. Six plates shown at the Silas Marder Gallery, 'Home Sweet Home' exhibition, Bridgehampton, New York. 09 -10.

The exhibition at the Silas Marder Gallery echoed my first Doctorate Showcase exhibition. I exhibited plates from the Showcase exhibition plus three new single themed plates that expanded on the idea of love and death. For this exhibition the gallery built a mantelpiece for the presentation of the plates. This added an extra layer of meaning to the idea of domestic objects. I might consider in the future using this form of presentation again if it is appropriate. After this exhibition I started to think about producing plates within a series as clear themes started to evolve from the process of making the first dozen plates. I realised I could take one theme and develop it over a number of plates, allowing an idea to be explored more thoroughly. At that time, this change from single objects to themes seemed insignificant. In hindsight, I realised it was exposing a weakness in my methodology. This was connected to my concentration, my use of time in making and thinking, the need to allow ideas to germinate



Fig 14. Chap prints from chapbook. 16thC-19thC. A pocket-sized booklet of disposable printed material depicting popular or folk literature. The term is derived from chapmen, chap coming from the Old English *céap* meaning "deal, barter, business", a variety of peddler, who circulated such literature as part of their stock.

My supervisors suggested I took as a potential theoretical starting point the work of Richard Kearney (1988), and his book, *The Wake of the Imagination*. This suggestion excited me as it involved investigating the history of theories around the imagination. This seemed like a logical step given the imagination's links to psychotherapy. Creativity has always fascinated the professions that concern themselves with the study of the psyche. Just as artworks contain images so do dreams and fantasies, so the interpretation of imagery is relevant to both art and the study of the psyche.

I have recently read Jonah Lehrer's (2012) book *Imagine, how creativity works*. This book attempts to uncover some of the mysteries of the imagination. He asks why so little research has been done on the subject, '*a recent survey of psychology papers published between 1950 and 2000 revealed that less than 1 percent of them investigated aspects of the creative process*' (Lehrer, 2012, p xvi). He looks at the latest research into individual acts of creativity, brain scanning, work environments, group creativity and ideas of conceptual blending. Lehrer writes:

'The best way to understand conceptual blending is to look at the classic children's book Harold and the Purple Crayon. The premise of the book is simple: Harold has a magic crayon. When he draws with this purple crayon, the drawing becomes real.....But here's the twist that makes Harold and the Purple Crayon such an engaging book: it blends together two distinct concepts of the world. Although the magic crayon is clearly a fantastical invention—a conceit that could never exist—Harold still has to obey the rules of reality. So when Harold draws a mountain and then climbs it, he must try not to slip and fall down. When he does slip—gravity exists even in this crayon universe—Harold has to draw a balloon to save himself. In other words, the book is a delicate blend of the familiar and the fictional; Harold has a surreal tool, but it operates amid the usual constraints (Lehrer, 2012, p. 38).

Richard Kearney (1988) in his book, *The Wake of the Imagination* identifies four main meanings of imagination:

1. *The ability to evoke absent objects which exist elsewhere, without confusing these absent objects with the things present and here now.*
2. *The construction and/or use of material forms and figures such as paintings, statues, photographs etc. to represent real things in some 'unreal' way.*
3. *The fictional projection of non-existent things as in dreams or literary narrative.*
4. *The capacity of human consciousness to become fascinated by illusions, confusing what is real with what is unreal (Kearney, 1988, p.16).*

Kearney takes the position that as a culture we are in the 'Wake of the Imagination', or in other words, nearing the end of it. The idea of imagination has been marginalised as the postmodern undermines the modernist belief in the image as a bona fide expression. Proliferation of visual culture is such that 'We no longer appear to know who exactly produces or controls the images which condition our unconscious' (Kearney, 1988, p.3)

He goes on to say:

The Human ability to 'image' or 'imagine' something has been understood in two main ways throughout the history of Western thought - 1) as a representational faculty which produce images of some pre-existing reality, or - 2) as a creative faculty which produces images which often lay claim to an original status in their own right, These basic notions of the imagination have been used from the ancient Greeks to the modern existentialists. (Kearney, 1988, p.15)

We are 'split beings' Kearney argues, 'split between the conscious and the unconscious, strange and familiar, same and other' (Raney, 2005, p 2). Kearney is advocating a postmodern imagination that would incorporate both the 'poetical and the ethical' (Kearney,1988,p386), a relationship between the 'self and the other' (Kearney,1988,p363). The poetical imagination Kearney writes, 'is the carnival of possibilities...The poetical imagination opposes the apartheid logic of black and white' (Kearney,1988, p 369).

For Kearney, the ethical imagination is defined as 'where each of us is obliged to make an ethical decision, to say: here I stand...In the face of the postmodern logic of

interminable deferment...here and now I face an other who demands of me an ethical response' (Kearney, 1988, p 361). Kearney suggests that the ethical and poetical imagination need each other to co-exist, so that the ethical imagination *'does not degenerate into a censorious puritanism'* (Kearney, 1988, p 366) and the poetical imagination does not slide into an attitude of *'anything goes and everything is everything else because it is, in the final analysis, nothing at all'* (Kearney, 1988, p 369).

Kearney does not want a return to the *'humanist cult of autonomous subjectivity that tended to exclude the other'* (Kearney, 1988, p 369). He goes on to talk about the role of the unconscious as revealed by psychoanalysis as a *'playground of images and symbols which defy the laws of formal logic'* (Kearney, 1988, p 368). When the *'controlling censorious ego is off-guard, taken by surprise, overtaken from behind by the otherness which precedes the sense of self and subverts the priorities of self-possession'* (Kearney, 1988, p368).

Kearney's writing inspired me to interview other artist regarding how they use their imaginations as I was reflecting on how I used my own. I interviewed Mark Currah, Mark Hampson, Lesley Logue, Susan Stockwell and Grayson Perry. Grayson Perry describes his imagination as:

The engine of play, my job as an artist is to play with purpose and imagination allows your experiences of who you are, the culture you consume to mix together. It makes a soup of content to pluck ideas from. So a good imagination can pluck stuff from the soup and then you make it into your own tradition. So where do I start when I have a blank canvas in front of me? Well, for me the imagination is a mix of my personal iconography from my childhood, the narrative of my childhood and the narrative of the world, and then seeing how they interplay. New ideas are not comfortable and you have to get used to them. In the past I embraced what I found difficult about modern art and now I'm questioning the orthodoxies of modern art! It all goes in the soup! (Perry, 2008)

After the interviews I also reflected on what the other interviewees had talked about. I identified with Mark Hampson's thought's about *'not forgetting to use the imagination'* (Hampson, 2008) as I feel in the past that I have not prioritised the time needed to process thoughts and ideas throughly. Lesley Logue's idea of the

imagination 'as *making sense of the world by looking at all the various options* ' (Logue, 2008) reminded me to remain open to all possibilities of what a work of art could be on a visual and intellectual level. Mark Currah's version of a space that can '*allow the mind to drift* ' (Currah, 2008) resonates with how I engage with my imagination. From Susan Stockwell I respond to the idea of the imagination as '*quite challenging and quite uncomfortable sometimes*' (Stockwell, 2008) as it is a thick '*soup to pluck ideas from*' (Perry, 2008).

Theory and Creative Practice – *Development of work and research 2010-12*

The plates that were inspired by my family album started out as attempts to use the photograph to explore the issues of memory and interpretations of the lived experience. I decided early on in the Doctorate Programme to follow this line of inquiry as a potential strand of theoretical research.

Geoffrey Batchen's (2002) *Forget me Not, Photography and Remembrance* provided an insight into an area of domestic photographic assemblages made during the mid 19th and 20th century (Fig 15). These assemblages focus on the relationship between:

photography and memory, and explores the curious and centuries-old practice of strengthening the emotional appeal of photographs by embellishing them-with text, paint, frames, embroidery, fabric, string, hair, why words, bullets, cigar wrappers, butterfly wings, and more-to create strange and often beautiful hybrid objects, part memento, part obsessive assemblage (Batchen, 2004, p 96).

Batchen's theories about photography, memory and remembrance provide a context for my work that incorporate photographs and make reference to remembrance and commemoration. I am interested in how I celebrate the everyday, how I wish to make the everyday significant, while recognizing in myself thoughts of impermanence.



Fig 15. Makers unknown; photographer: P.E. Lynne, *Memorial to a young man*, 1910.

Batchen's comments that the works were meant to be:

Displayed in parlors or living rooms or as part of everyday attire, these objects occupied a liminal space between public and private. They were, in other words, meant to do their work over and over again, and to be seen by both intimates and strangers....They affirm the close proximity of life and death, and attempt, against common sense, to use one to deny the finality of the other. Their ultimate goal is nothing less than immortality...remind(ing) us that the memorialisation has little to do with recalling the past; it is always about looking ahead towards that terrible, imagined, vacant future in which we ourselves will have been forgotten (Batchen, 2004, p 98).

Batchen's remarks reminded me of my first impulse to make the ceramic urn for my destroyed artworks (*Fig 9*), a vessel that could represent a form of personal shrine, commemorating my visual history, containing the residue of my creative memories.

In a chapter on 'Post Memory', in Joan Gibbon's (2007) book, *Contemporary Art and Memory, Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, she writes on Christian Boltanski in his work 'Album of the Family D. 1939-1964 (1971)';

Boltanski at first saw the piece as a record of the family's existence and the significant events of their lives, he later stated that, rather than teaching about the family D., 'they sent the viewer back to his or her own past (Gibbons, 2007, p 77).

Reading Batchen and Gibbons opened up interesting avenues into the ideas of memory and commemoration that helped me to question and reflect on the content and intention of the work I had started to develop.

After reading Kearney I had begun to read other philosophical discourses connected with the Imagination. I found the academic theories dense and difficult to decipher. Books such as *Imagination, Philosophy and the Arts* edited by Matthew Kieran and Dominic McIver Lopes (2003) contains a number of essays concerning imagination, narrative and emotions, truth in imagination, and sensory imagination.

Kendall Walton's (1990) *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* examines theories concerned with representational art, fiction, and imagination, which I could not align with my practice. I became frustrated with my attempts to find a balance for myself between theoretical discourse and my practice. I could not negotiate the language and thoughts contained in many of the philosophical texts, let alone use them as a supporting discourse within my work.

The exception to this was Ruth M.J.Byrne (2007), *The Rational Imagination*, how people create alternatives to reality, in which she refers to the counterfactual imagination. How people think about what might have been, If only;

for instance, when someone thinks about how an event in the past might have turned out differently, or when someone creates a daydream or a fantasy. They also occur when a child engages in pretend play or chats with an imaginary friend or soft toy. Counterfactual suppositions can be close to the facts ("if Molly had joined the running team, she would have become slim"), or they can be remote ("if Molly had joined the running team, she would have become an Olympic gold medal winner. (Byrne, 2007, p 2)

I have been captivated by these daily imaginings of 'if only' or 'what If: Batchen's 'imagined, vacant future' (Batchen, 2004, p 98) and Boltanski's 'they sent the viewer back to his or her own past' (Gibbons, 2007, p 77). These intriguing ideas have contributed to the development of my practice. One of my favourite quotes that I have come across during my research is by the British philosopher Raymond Tallis (2010) who articulates, 'We all share the human wound of a finite life, a life of incomplete meanings' (*Creativity and Imagination*, 2010).

In June 2011 when I attended an International conference at the Royal College of Art entitled, 'Imagining the Imagination', new links started to be revealed.

The abstract for the conference, described the imagination as:

the most significant capacity of humans to interact with the environment. Just with imagination we are able to connect the past with the future, which forms the basis of decision-making processes. To understand the complex and highly determined processes of imagination, the Imagining Imagination International Conference provides an interdisciplinary perspective to understand how culture – images, music, language, poetry – influences and determines our imaginative world. Significantly, all these fields of knowledge-production are currently re-addressing imagination beyond romantic conceptions, as a complex thinking process. (Royal College of Art, 2011)

I hoped that the conference would open new avenues of investigation and help me consolidate my initial enthusiasm for my research involving the imagination.

As part of the conference, the artist Patricia Townsend discussed work she had made inspired by visiting Morecombe Bay and the surrounding landscape. She approached her presentation from a psychoanalytic view of the role of the imagination within the creative process of a visual artist. Townsend referred to the writing of Donald Winnicott. Winnicott conceives the imagination as having three parts: An outer world of consciousness of reality, an inner world of unconscious phantasy, and where these collide a third space of play and creativity. Winnicott referred to this as a 'transitional' space. Townsend went on to say that when she made her work she is in a constant state of synthesis between the three elements of imagination that are contributing to the production of the art work.

I can identify with Townsend and this transitional space of play and creativity. During the doctorate I have re-established this space of play within my practice. My difficulty in answering my question, 'how do I use my imagination', made me realise that I had marginalised this transitional space. I realised that I had downgraded the importance of time, space, reflection and play, whilst I maintained my academic and commercial art career. The importance of this re-alignment in the act of making and thinking has been crucial to my development. In hindsight, on an unconscious level, I believe I started the doctorate programme to find a transitional space to reignite my creativity beyond the boundaries I had previously imposed upon myself.

After Patricia Townsend's mention of Winnicott, I started to consider his Theory of Transitional Objects, and researched a number of interpretations that included this summary on the Psychotherapy web site, Changing Minds (2002-12):

The creation of a transition object is perhaps the first truly creative act of the child as it uses its imagination to create reality out of nothing. The transition object is a tool that allows the child to let go of the mother and develop a more independent existence. It can take the object anywhere and receive a quick dose of comfort whenever it feels anxious. Winnicott noted that the transition object allows the child to enter the paradoxical feeling that they have simultaneously created and discovered the object. The object may also be

the subject of the child's phantasies, for example where a teddy bear is spoken to, hugged, punished, etc. It thus becomes a tool for practicing interaction with the external world. By giving the bear a will of its own, the child is also phantasizing that it is not omnipotent and can yet survive this initially scary state. Play thus provides a pathway to independence. The use of transition objects continues through our lives as we imbue objects with meaning and memories that are associated with other ideas, places and people. Photographs, mementos and other memorabilia are used to remember good times and friends (Changing Minds, 2012).

With theories of Winnicott's transitional objects in mind I started to further my investigations into possible theoretical support for my creative practice, with Sherrie Turkle's (2007) book, *Evocative Objects – Things we think with*. This book is edited by Turkle and is a collection of writings by scientists, humanists, artists, and designers that 'trace the power of everyday things';

These essays reveal objects as emotional and intellectual companions that anchor memory, sustain relationships, and provoke new ideas...inviting us to look more closely at the everyday objects of our lives, the familiar objects that drive our routines, hold our affections, and open our world in unexpected ways...We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas, underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things. We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with. (Turkle, 2007,p 5)

Turkle splits the essays into groups under titles such as, *Objects of History and Exchange, Objects of Transition and Passage, Objects of Mourning and Memory*. In an essay by Tracy Gleason (from *Objects of Transition and Passage*), entitled *Murray: The Stuffed Bear*, Gleason describes her relationship with her younger sister Shayna, and Shayna's stuffed bear called Murray:

When I find him on the floor, I feel compelled to pick him up... I could no more walk past Murray as he lies in an uncomfortable position than I could ignore my sister's pleas to play with her or the cat's meows for food. Here, Murray has nothing to do with

intellect and everything to do with love. The adults in Shayna's life see Murray according to their own desires. For me, Murray has many faces. As a sister, I am grateful to him for bringing me closer to Shayna... As a researcher, he has given me a ringside seat at the performance of Shayna's imagination, even as I remind myself that in fact it was she, as his creator, who bought me the ticket to that seat. (Turkle, 2007,p 174)

In 2011, I visited a collector's home in New York to see two of my plates in situ, (that had been bought in 2010 from my exhibition at the Silas Marder Gallery). In their house they had built a shelf for the works and also surrounded the plates with small stuffed dogs (Fig 16). At first I was surprised by the way the collectors had presented the work. I was uncertain about how to read this arrangement. I was then told that these stuffed animals were love tokens, given to each other over a fifty-year period. This was the first time I had seen an example of how the plates might function among other collected objects. I was transported back to my original idea when I made the urn to make objects for my home, objects imbued with memory, commemoration and reflection.



Fig 16. *Feeling Invisible and Love*, Ceramic Plates. 50x50cm 2009.

More recently I sold a plate containing a drawing of a golden tree, with the words, *a place to put secrets*. It was bought for a golden wedding anniversary and the purchaser gave me a photograph of the plate being presented to the couple (Fig 17).

When I thanked him for this photograph he said it sat proudly among the family photographs and holiday knick-knacks on the sideboard in the living room. I enjoy the idea of the plates sitting side by side among treasured possessions, on a sideboard or mantle piece. My object becomes part of a family's home situated amongst family memorabilia.



Fig 17. *A place to put secrets* Ceramic plate. 50x50cm. 2011.

Whilst visiting the Venice Biennale in 2011 I went to the Peggy Guggenheim Museum (Fig 18). This provided a stark contrast to the large installation spaces of the Biennale. The Guggenheim museum is built on a domestic scale, as it had been her home, and it was filled with work of an appropriate scale. Each room in the Museum was augmented with an earlier photograph of the room as a living space with Peggy Guggenheim in the image, next to the works. I responded positively to the scale of these works and how they filled a space. The art works were mainly modernist painting and sculptures, but it was not the artistic content as much as the scale of the works in a once domestic space, that appealed to me.



Fig 18. Peggy Guggenheim in her home in Venice.

On arriving back in the UK I visited my mother in Manchester (Fig 19-20). I photographed the objects that she surrounds herself with. I started to wonder what the function of these objects were for my mother. When I asked, she talked about each one, its history, its emotional connection, its beauty, a record of her experiences.

What I responded to in her collection was the idea of her experiences stored in these mementos from her holidays in Spain or Disney world, of family births, deaths and marriages, acting as silent prompts to her memories. These domestic knick-knacks and collectables, I realised, contain transitional characteristics.



Fig 19. Objects in Mrs Great-Rex house. 2011.



Fig 20. Objects in Mrs Great-Rex house. 2011.

In the book entitled, *Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy* by Elizabeth Ann Ellsworth (2005), Ellsworth writes about transitional objects and states:

Winnicott believed that adults continue to create and use transitional objects ...Winnicott saw transitional objects as fundamental elements of culture and the way into the world's of play and creativity, including the arts, religion, and science. An individuals use of an object ...or events is what turns it into a transitional object. Nothing is intrinsically transitional outside of its use. Transitional objects become transitional for us when we use them to creatively form ourselves in relation. A transitional object becomes pedagogical when we use it to discover and creatively work and play at our own limits as participants in the world... As material objects in the world they occupy physical space, but as they are made transitional in their use they move into the virtual space between inner realities and outer realities...In his series of essays on aesthetic experience and what it is that we do with works of art, P de Bola (Art Matters, 2001) suggests that all aesthetic experiences can be seen as being, in at least one respect, experiences of the learning self. This is, he suggests that art works can be seen as being, in at least one sense, pedagogical...I believe we can see that de Bolas discussions of artworks as discussions of what Winnicott would call transitional objects. (Ellsworth, 2005, p.78)

After reading Ellsworth I started thinking about the function of making artworks for myself. I remembered part of Gerhard Richter's conversation with Nicholas Serota (2011) from the Tate Modern catalogue *Panorama*. Serota asks the question:

NS: So what is the purpose of art?

GR: For surviving this world. One of many, many ... like bread, like love.

NS: And what does it give you?

GR: [laughs] Well, certainly something you can hold on to ... it has the measure of all the infathomable. senseless things, the incessant ruthlessness of our world. And art shows us how to see things that are constructive and good, and to be an active part of that.

NS: So it gives a structure to the world?

GR: Yes, comfort, hope, so it makes sense to be part of that. (Godfrey and Serota, 2011, p 25)

The theoretical discourse and the physical creative act of my making have constantly interweaved and entwined throughout the doctorate programme. In 2010-11, I started to make my first themed series of plates concerned with the notion of Love, with the intention to complete a group of five plates (*Fig 23*). I decided that five was a good number to group the plates together. Five provides an opportunity to have a beginning middle and end, forming a possible narrative. Although I was starting to think of a group I still wanted the plates to exist as autonomous objects in their own right.

For this group of, 'love' inspired plates, I wanted to revisit an earlier plate I had made, (*Love is really unpredictable. Fig 8. Appendix page 79*). This was the first plate I had made in 2009 and the energy and simplicity of the sgrafito drawn image directly onto the plate, leaving the clay visible and exploiting the handmade mark, has both a brutality and a beauty that appeals to me. I also wanted to experiment with a change of font, inspired by my research of traditional ceramic ware in the Staffordshire Museum collection (*Fig 21-22*).



Fig 21. Puzzle Jug, 1798. Staffordshire Museum.
Maker Unknown



(Fig 22) Thomas Toft, 1670.
Staffordshire Museum

These works made between 1600-1800, have a simplicity of colour and marks (drawn and written) that interested me. The content would usually be the coronation of Kings and Queens, or poems about love or drinking and morals taken from the bible. I wanted to make my contemporary version of these traditional English wares, following aesthetically in their steps. Using the traditional form to collide with my content, I hoped that the viewer would have a sense of familiarity of having seen it before, but also of difference, a potential new dialogue being realised through my use of imagery and text.

Each plate takes a different idea of what love could encompass, such as *A story to believe in, Love is really unpredictable, If a bird lands on your head does it build a nest, Things are usual and then happiness arrives, Love hot cold stale fresh betrayed denied.*

These, 'love' inspired plates needed the text to be clearly legible; I did not want the viewing filter of decoration to be prominent. I wanted the association to traditional commemorative plates to be part of the reading. I wanted the overriding aesthetics of the plates to draw the viewer in, before they experience on closer inspection, my contemporary version of the commemoration of love.



Fig 23. End of Year Doctorate Showcase 2011. Love series. Five Ceramic Plates. 50 x 50 cm each. .

Bottom to top. A story to believe in, Love is really unpredictable. If a bird lands on your head does it build a nest? Love hot cold stale
fresh betrayed denied. Things are usual and then happiness arrives.,

The first plate in the series is entitled, *A story to believe in* (Fig 11. Appendix, page 82). This plate explores romantic love, idealised love, teenage love, love that comes through the movies or magazines. It is a version of love as fantasy. The kind of love that is good to role-play on special occasions, but not great on a daily basis for a relationship that has to manage all of life's complexities. The image I created is the cliché of love-birds kissing. I attempted to counter balance the sweetness of the image by scoring and scratching into the plate, like a lover's mark on a tree trunk.

Love is really unpredictable (Fig 12. Appendix, page 83), is a remake of an earlier plate (Fig 8. Appendix, page 79). I re-used the original idea for this plate that came from thinking about the difficulty of always being able to give love and receive love without expectations. Each statement about love, on each plate, aims to build a dialogue of the difficulties in describing the complexities of how love can be interpreted.

If a bird lands on your head, does it build a nest? (Fig 13. Appendix, page 84) Part of this text comes from a traditional Amish fable. The moral in the quote is that we all have a choice in love when unexpected opportunities arrive. You decide if you want to take the opportunity or not. The image I created is of an exotic bird spreading his or her wings, or as you might say, showing off his or her bling.

Love, hot cold stale fresh betrayed denied. (Fig 14. Appendix, page 85). Love comes in many disguises and has many descriptions. I created the image of a couple kissing, as I wanted to state that love is all of these things, at different times, and is part of a loving relationship, good and bad, hot and cold, fresh and stale.

Things are usual then happiness arrives. (Fig 15. Appendix, page 86). I was watching a foreign film and a priest is asked by a young woman 'how do you know when love arrives?' He thinks and says *things are usual and then happiness arrives*. I am unsure if this is exactly what he said or not, but this is what I remembered. I created an image of a boy and girl on a swing enjoying the arrival of happiness.

I exhibited the Love series of works in the doctorate summer exhibition in July 2011 (Fig 23). At the seminar accompanying the doctorate exhibition the artist

Alan Kane lead the group of myself and four other fellow students. Alan commented that the plates were '*striking objects*'. He commented on how for him ceramics had '*a warm generous feeling, very human, something to use, an object taking a modest art position*'. He also talked about how for him, text can be a problem in art works but that these ceramic plates work well with text. A fellow student Lewis Paul talked about the plates '*drawing you in through the material, which is associated with the domestic. The plates connect to a human story, wanting to reflect it back, making a visceral connection to the object*'. Lewis asked the question '*What do we make in a media saturated world screaming for our attention?*'. He went on to say that '*these plates with their craft material are engaging people, it's not a dashed off graphic but carved into clay.*'

Throughout the doctorate programme Grayson Perry has been my main artistic influence as I respond to his use of ceramics and the conflict within his work, between function and decoration. I also identify with Grayson Perry when he says:

The low status of ceramics is one of the many layers in the work and the prejudices that everyone has about ceramics - whether they be good or bad is the first filter through which all the work is viewed. (Buck, 2000, p.69)

Alan Kane talked about ceramics as '*an object taking a modest art position*'. I am interested in this comment as I want this to be a context of the work. My objective is for the work to draw you in, or as Grayson Perry states:

I want to make something that lives with the eye as a beautiful piece of art, but on closer inspection, a polemic or ideology will come out of it. Not so that it destroys the intrinsic pattern and beauty of it. I don't want to sacrifice the aesthetic for the idea, I want the two to be so close that they live happily together, or maybe not happily, but so that there is a frisson. (Perry, 2002, p. 24)

After the Imagination conference at the RCA I decided over the summer of 2011 to begin a new series of plates based around psychoanalytical ideas of projection, transference and transitional objects. (Fig 24). I had started this series some eighteen months previously when I made *My cat knows what I am thinking* (second from left Fig 24 or Fig 17. Appendix, page 88), but I was unsure how to proceed.



Fig 24. Five Ceramic Plates. 50 x 50 cm each. 2012.

Bottom to top. *They made me do it. My cat knows what I'm thinking. Feeling invisible. Being alone with your thoughts is no fun. Optimistic outsider.*

I had always wanted to make a series of works with drawn images of stuffed animals as they are usually seen on greetings cards, and viewed as clichéd or kitsch. I enjoy the fact that the viewer might question whether the text is ‘fridge magnet’ philosophy, or a serious look at complicated issues, or both.

For this series of plates I used my chap-print inspired font again. I wanted to make these plates fun and highly decorative. This font allows me to exaggerate and fill the plate with my design. I wanted to make images on the plates that look benign at first glance so I chose toy animals. I want the viewer to stand in front of this shiny plate with a drawing of a toy animal on, to be pulled in by the allure of the potential haptic qualities before deciphering the ambiguities within the object.

The first plate in this series is *They made me do it.* (Fig 16. Appendix, page 87). I worked as a counsellor for an organisation called the Violence Initiative in 2005. One of the reoccurring conversations with the clients was the belief that other people made them act as they did. I chose the rabbit as he looks like he has been fighting, yet he is a bit puny, and stands there claiming they made him do it, looking innocent. I was thinking about how we imagine we take personal responsibility for our actions, but how easy it is to blame others for our behaviours.

My cat knows what I’m thinking. (Fig 17. Appendix, page 88). I always talk to my mum through her dog. When I ask her how she is she says *oh I’m ok*. But when I ask her how the dog is I get a much truer reflection on how she is. When she says the dogs not feeling well I ask, *are you not feeling good today*, and she says, *no I was up all night!* I used a drawing of a cat as I had, until recently, a cat called ‘Derek’ and sometimes I talk to him, saying how my days gone. Then I project my thoughts of happiness, sadness or anger on to this animal that has no idea of what I am talking about. But what ever my answer is to myself about what I think the cat is thinking, it is information, for what is going on with me that day.

Feeling Invisible. (Fig 18. Appendix, page 89). This plate came out of asking my grandmother what she thought was the worst thing about getting old. She told me she, ‘*felt invisible*’. My gran was once a very beautiful woman who ran her own successful business and was a huge presence as a personality within the family. My

grandmother made this comment near the end of her life, and it reminds me of what Joseph Campbell (1988) said: *The secret cause of all suffering is mortality itself, which is the prime condition of life. It cannot be denied if life is to be affirmed.* (Campbell, 1988)

Being alone with your thoughts is no fun (Fig 19. Appendix page 90). I had used this phrase before for one of the first plates I made in 2009 (Fig 12. Forth plate from the left). This came from the idea that the more you internalise and talk to yourself the greater the chance the story you tell yourself becomes distorted. Rather than an anatomical image of a head, this time I used a small dog looking sad, being with his own thoughts, a dog that thinks too much.

Optimistic outside (Fig 20. Appendix, page 91) is a plate named after me. My partner refers to me as the optimistic outsider. Not an angry outsider or rebel, but a humourist, always looking to do things differently and remove myself from established structures; philosophically acknowledging what I can control and what I cannot control. The image is of a teddy bear that I had from the age of one. My mum sent me it in the post after Grayson Perry and I visited her one evening after a football match. Grayson told her the story of his teddy, Alan Measles. Grayson's teddy was a transitional object for him as he used it to negotiate his childhood experiences. My teddy was not transitional for me to the same extent but I think the image and the text on the plate are a good portrait of me, a projection of my perceived human qualities.

In his most recent exhibition at the British Museum *The Tomb of the unknown Craftsman* (2011-12) Grayson Perry also comments on transitional objects and writes:

Soft toys, particularly those that become a child's special favourite, their 'transitional object', have much in common with traditional gods. They are both inanimate objects and carriers of ideas onto which we project our human qualities. (Perry, 2011, p. 17)

I also identify with Grayson Perry in his experience of therapy. In 2005 I interviewed him for an essay on his prints, and specifically the 'Map of an Englishman' (Fig 25) that accompanied an exhibition of *Contemporary British Printmakers*. The twist that Perry brings is that although it looks like a map of an existing island, it is in fact an imagined map rather than a pictorial description of a place. Perry says: 'During therapy I realised I was not in full possession of my interior landscape'. (Great-Rex, 2005, p10) Perry describes this map as part of 'getting the deeds' (Great-Rex, 2005, p11) to his own interior landscape.



Fig 25. Grayson Perry, *Map of an Englishman*, etching, 150 x 120cm 2004.

My supervisors had thought that maybe the way that text operated in my work could be a potential avenue of research and to think about the 'instability of text not in a semantic way but the instability of text into decoration'. This echoed the comments by the Artist and writer Mark Currah in a previous year's interim exhibition seminar (2010) when he contemplated the text in my work having a:

beauty in itself; I like how the abstract shapes in the text hold themselves within the image. I hold off reading them as text, which suggests the text is holding back and has secrecy about it, which you have to take apart, you have to tease it out so that you have to engage and work at it. Text is very dogmatic, it has a sense of closure, we are used to reading things but not to have it made difficult (Currah, 2010).

So I started to research other artists' use of text in their work. David Hockney says:

that moment you put a word in a painting people read it, it's like an eye. If there's an eye in a painting you look at it, and you can't not read a word. (Sykes, 2011, p.69)

David Beech states in *Text Art Today* (2009):

The first generation of text art, with artists such as Art & Language, Keith Arnatt, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, were primarily motivated by the analytical philosophy of Wittgenstein, Austin, Willard van Orman Quine and A.J. Ayer. The second generation of text artists, including Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Kay Rosen and Raymond Pettibon, were informed by Structuralist and Poststructuralist theories of language and meaning from Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Derrida and Jacques Lacan.... for the artists who emerged in the wake of the second generation of text artists, such as Patterson, Bob and Roberta Smith, and Titchner, the linguistic turn serves only as a set of background assumptions which have taken hold in contemporary art. So, with the linguistic turn thoroughly incorporated into art theory itself, text art develops by drawing on art, its histories and theories. (Selby, 2009, p.31)

I respond to Christopher Wool's black and white industrial stenciled works, which seem to explore the possibilities of legibility and illegibility by making his texts difficult to decipher, playing with the notion of interpretation and comprehension (Fig 26).

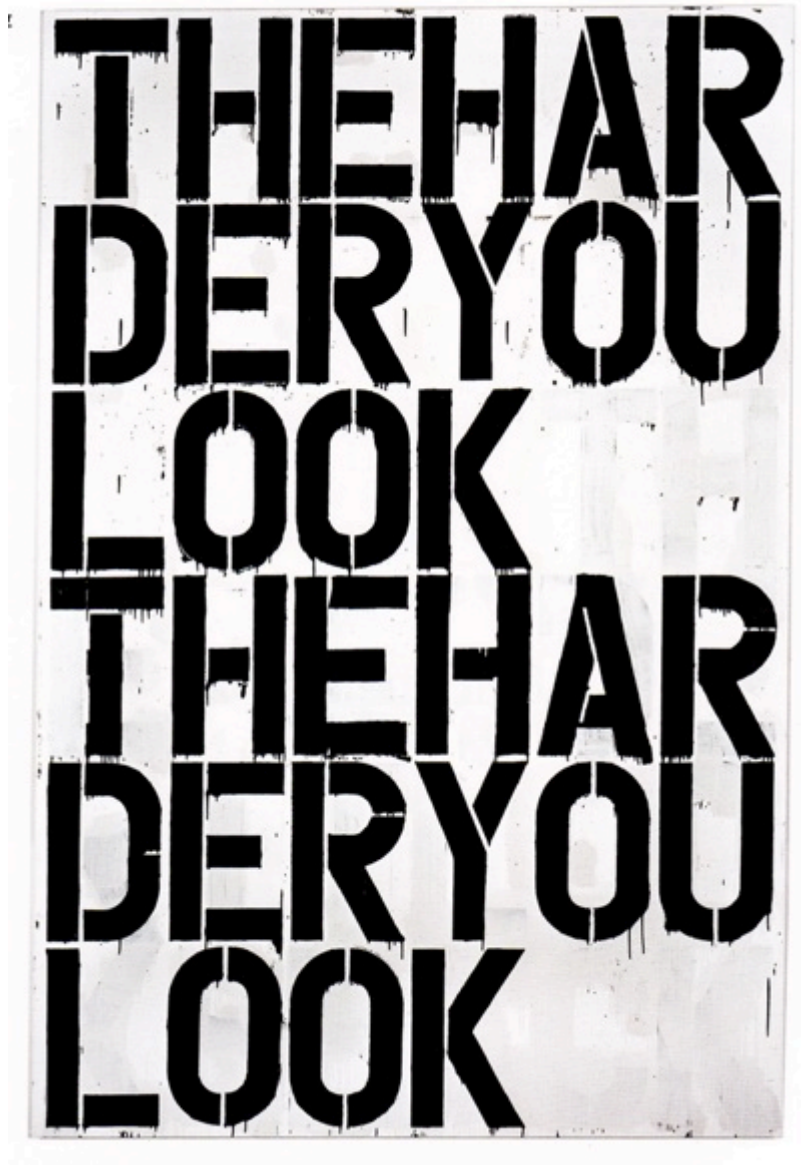


Fig 26. Christopher Wool. *Untitled*. Enamel on Aluminium, 274.5 x 183cm. 2000.

I also see my use of text connected with Grayson Perry's work (Fig 27) and when I interviewed him recently he commented that he had:

Used text since the year dot and it most probably has its roots in pop art, advertising, cartoons. I've used it since I was a kid so it feels very natural and in ceramics there's a long tradition of text in commemorative ware, satirical events, political statements etc. I've always used words in a cheeky way, a mischievous way, to add a layer of humour. I also use words in my work to put over abstract ideas, as I don't want to illustrate a philosophy so it's about adding a layer of information to the artwork. I used to joke that the text kept people looking at the work longer, people feel obliged to read it! (Perry, 2012).



Fig 27. Grayson Perry. *The Rosetta Vase*. Glazed Ceramic Pot. 2011.

I want to use text to gently encourage the audience to look and think while connecting the images and words together in their imaginations, subconsciously playing with and exploring the possibilities of legibility and illegibility and at the same time using the text to embellish the formal qualities of the design on the plate. My aspiration is for the viewer to be coaxed by the craft and stimulated by the content.

While making the psychotherapy inspired plates I also started a group of plates contemplating existentialist questions (Fig 28). I had already made two plates earlier in my 2009 doctorate exhibition and my exhibition at the Silas Marder Gallery in 2009-10. These plates were called *What is Man* (Fig 7. Appendix, page 78) and *The End* (Fig 13. Plate on far right of image). I decided to remake these plates for this existential series. I felt the method of drawing directly into the plates, as I did for the *Love* series (Fig 13), was a positive way to proceed. I could build on my previous knowledge and execution of earlier plates for the, 'love' series, that took traditional English commemorative wares as their aesthetic touchstone.

The first plate I made was *What is man* (Fig 21. Appendix, page 92). I was thinking about the clarity and significance of the written text this time. I wanted the text to be more legible, easier to read. I used a font similar to traditional commemorative slipware plates. *What is man* is a question aimed at the viewer, rather than a personal question for me as it had been previously.

Its about nothing (Fig 22. Appendix, page 93) is a reaction to what cannot be understood or made sense of. Prior to the making of this plate, a friend of mine committed suicide by hanging himself in his studio. His action is difficult for me to understand on many levels, as there are so many unanswered questions of why and if only. I remembered talking to this friend many years ago when I was a student and I asked him *what's this life all about?* He replied, *It's about nothing*.

There isn't any world but this one (Fig 23. Appendix, page 94) is a reaction to the Japanese Tsunami. The plate pays homage visually to traditional Japanese landscapes. A scene of erupting volcanoes and raging seas draws attention to the fragility of the physical structure we live on. The text is meant as an ambiguous comment that can be read two ways. It states the obvious and also admonishes us to live now.



Fig 28. Five Ceramic Plates. 50 x 50 cm each. 2012.

Bottom to top. What is man. It's about nothing. There isn't any world but this one. What have we learnt today. The end

What have we learnt today (Fig 24. Appendix, page 95) is a question I ask myself daily. I used the image of a tree and a family as visual metaphors for learning and sharing. Asking myself this question raises my self-awareness. This plate makes a clear and optimistic statement, that no matter what happens in life you have to move forward with family and community, the best companions.

The end (Fig 25. Appendix, page 96) is concerned with how we address the end of life. I have always thought a great deal about my relationship to death. My father died when I was 21 and close friends have died suddenly during my life. It has left me with a sense of always being prepared at any time for the unexpected visit of death. This plate is my version of a dance with death who laughs while he climbs a tree holding the hourglass.

In the production of this series I accidentally chipped the corner of one of the plates (Fig 29). Normally I do not believe in happy accidents as I would like to get as close as possible to what I originally aimed for. But this chip gave the plate an implied history. I later experimented with consciously chipping another plate (Fig 30). This time the effect didn't work as well as some of the chips looked too large and contrived. It is something I might consider in the future if the idea and images could work together to feed the implied meaning in the artworks.



Fig 29. *There isn't any world but this one*. 2011.



Fig 30. *Experimental plate*. 2011.

In a tutorial, Geoff Brunell and Karen Raney remarked on one of the plates from this series that was inscribed, *It's about nothing*. They responded to the delicate finish and allure of the object juxtaposed with an image of a man hanging from a tree. They also commented that the image seemingly broke the edge of the plate and visually made the object more expansive (Fig 22. Appendix, page 93). I feel when I can get the disjunction between the plate as the object and the content within it, then the plates start to work as artworks and have layers of meaning for the viewer to work with.

Theory and Creative Practice - *Creative Mistakes*

In Grayson Perry's studio, etched into a concrete beam, he has written *Creativity is Mistakes*. Creative success is often very close to failure, and often the closer I get to a sense of failure a more interesting work emerges.

The project I describe now, is the part of my practice that has not been developed but has formed part of my learning during the doctorate. Grayson Perry had begun a large body of work for his exhibition at the British Museum called the *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman, 2011-12*. The centrepiece of the exhibition was a large 12ft iron boat that was to be a metaphorical tomb (Fig 31), a work that he had started two years previously for the exhibition.

The size and ambition of this piece inspired me to attempt to challenge my scale of production. I had seen how long it had taken Grayson to make this piece so I thought two years for me would be a good length of time to make models and sort out the content before the final doctorate exhibition in 2013. I started to build a small model of a 'tree/shrine' (Fig 33), to see if it had a future as a larger artwork approximately eight feet high. The idea was stimulated by looking at roadside shrines (Fig 32) and considering what is happening in these public spaces where these acts of private emotional out-pouring occur, the memorialisation taking place both publicly and privately.



Fig 31. Grayson Perry.
Tomb of the unknown craftsman. 2012.



Fig 32. Roadside shrine in London. 2010.

This idea excited me even though the form of the object and the ideas behind it were not fully formed. I kept working on the model over the summer of 2011 but in the final analysis I didn't take it any further. The main reasons for my change of heart was my resistance to give so much time to building it as it would take the bulk of my studio time over the following eighteen months. Also as an artwork it might not achieve what I wanted it to and my own lack of ability at this point to make a three dimensional object was obvious after building the model. I felt I could not be as intuitive as I needed to be if I chained myself to an outcome with a two year gestation period. Recently I have seen a tree in the exhibition, *Bronze*, at the Royal Academy which ignited in me the possibility of remaking this work in the future, after the doctorate (Fig 34).



Fig 33. Tree/shrine model. 2011.



Fig 34. Roman First Century Bronze tree 87cm x 50cm.
Museum Archeologico Nazionale, Florence.

I recently asked Grayson Perry what he thought was the biggest piece of learning from the British Museum exhibition and he replied:

I have a love hate relationship with the big project, I like the adventure but you are locked into it and that has its own drama. You can't muck about with a big project and I have this dual personality of the hobbit and the punk. The punk wants to be more of an activist, do things that take ten minutes and have an Arte Povera-ness about it! While the hobbit wants to be more crafted and be on a spiritual journey! Those are the two forces competing in my work. The British Museum was a hobbit exhibition but the punk came out in the labelling! (Perry, 2012).

I also researched a number of other artists and artworks when starting this tree/shrine project. These included Gabriel Orozco, Paul Noble, Kurt Schwitters, Scholar Stones, and Reliquaries.

I looked at Gabriel Orozco's ceramic artworks and in particular the piece *My Hands are my Heart*. 1991 (Fig 35). Discussing the starting point for this piece, which was made while he was assisting Antony Gormley to produce *American Field* in 1990, Orozco has said:

I found this place in Cholula, which is a town that just makes bricks. It's an amazing place. So we spent two weeks doing the production of the work. And I remember at some point, I took up a piece of clay and I just did it as a gesture, I didn't plan it. And then I put it in the oven with all the other pieces, and then it came out, and it was perfectly cooked. It looked really great. Antony looked at it and said, 'Hmm. Maybe in that you have everything I'm trying to say in the whole production of these thousands of pieces - maybe in that one piece you have said everything. (Morgan, 2011, p.15)



Fig 35. Gabriel Orozco's *My Hands are my Heart*. Fired Clay 1991.

While making the tree/shrine I considered whether I could ever let myself respond in a similar way as Orozco had to the clay. My answer would be, 'not at this present time', but this thought process made me think of Gerhard Richter in conversation with Nicholas Serota at his Tate Modern exhibition *Panorama* in 2011. Serota asks the question:

NS: *So why did you want to make abstract paintings? You had a reputation and a market as a painter of images.*

GR: *Perhaps because I'm a bit uncertain, a bit volatile. And I'd always been fascinated by abstraction. It's so mysterious, like an unknown land.*

NS: *So you saw abstraction as a challenge?*

GR: *Yes, something that wouldn't leave me in peace. Having grown up in the GDR. I'd actually been taught that it was nothing but rubbish. Abstract paintings - they don't make sense. But I was interested in it, and then I could always take comfort from or cite music, which is always abstract, unless you happen to be singing a song. That's how it was. Slowly feeling my way forwards. (Godfrey and Serota, 2011, p.20)*

While reading Sherry Turkle's (2007) *Evocative Objects: Things we think with*, I came across a chapter about Chinese Scholar Stones by Nancy Rosenblum. In it she says:

They have the power to provide an effortless, aesthetic experience of mystery. Of infinity in a finite space. Of transformation. Just by looking. Without philosophy. (Turkle, 2007, p. 255)

Turkle goes on to say in her conclusion in the book:

Scholars' rocks are found in nature, and then mounted on meticulously worked bases. The bases transform the rocks into things that are made as well as found, objects that invite reflection on the boundary between nature and culture. The rocks displace scale, time, and authorial intent. They are classically liminal objects...in traditional rites of passage; participants are separated from all that is familiar. We saw that this makes them vulnerable, open to the objects and experience of their time of transition. The contemplation of liminal objects can make us similarly vulnerable. In their disorienting qualities, in the way they remind us of the mundane yet take us away from it, scholars' rocks share something of what Freud called the uncanny, those things "known of old" yet strangely unfamiliar. (Turkle, 2007, p. 319)

By coincidence there was the exhibition *Structure and Absence* (2011-12) at White Cube, which also contained scholar stones (Fig 36) along with works by a number of artists including Jeff Wall, Damien Hirst, Andre Gursky, Gabrel Orozco and Robert Ryman. In the catalogue Dario Gamboni writes:

What can Chinese rocks do in an exhibition of contemporary art? Will they appear like aliens, boulders brought and left by some distant glacial age —or foreboding a new one? Will they set a trend in installation, like the works of 'Primitives' that featured in so many exhibitions of Modern art and were meant to buttress its claim to atemporal universality? They should in any case be interesting guests, diverting the conversation from habitual issues of authorship, intention, originality, and authenticity, towards the morphological and relational questions raised by their thingness and by their ambivalent and precarious status, between places and between worlds. (Dario Gamboni 2011, p.17)



Fig 36. Chinese Scholar Stone . Rock and wooden base. 130.5cm x 56.5x 37.5cm.
White Cube gallery. *Structure and Absence* exhibition.

I started to think I might create my version of scholar stones until I came across a group of small sculptures inspired by scholar stones and made by Paul Noble (Fig 37). Paul Noble had been working at the Henry Moore institute and wanted to make the opposite of Henry Moore's monumental bronze works and so made ornamental sculptures inspired by Moore's sculptural shapes and traditional scholar stones. These works were originally exhibited at the Gagosian gallery (2009). The catalogue describes the work as:

These ceramics are, it should be said, very beautiful, glazed in ways that suggest the Japanese ceramic tradition brought to Europe by artists such as Bernard Leach... They are Moore's monuments reduced to the scale and status of ornaments, relegated to the devalued aesthetic territory of the decorative arts. They are forms that insults the pretensions of form-giving, the ultimate efflorescence of a body of work that seems to be concerned above all with reminding us of our place in the world, telling us that for all our grand projects, our desire for aggrandizement or liberation or domination, we are human scale creatures. We live in the world, and it lives in us. (Noble and Hari, 2008)



Fig 37. Paul Noble. Chinese Scholar Stone inspired by Henry Moore. 2009.
Gagosian gallery. London.

I did not make my versions of scholar stones as it felt too close to Paul Noble's work and I do not think I could make them as well as he had. What I will take from this description of Paul Noble's work and scholar stones is the notion that we are '*human scale creatures. We live in the world, and it lives in us*' (Noble and Hari, 2008).

I visited the *Treasures of Heaven* exhibition at the British Museum in 2011. I respond to objects and rituals that exist in religion especially ones with supposed magical powers. The reliquaries containing the hair of saints or the crown of thorns are incredibly beautiful as crafted objects, as well as being imbued with belief (Fig 38).



Fig 38. Portable Altar. German. The British Museum. 1190-1200.

There was also a box made by Kurt Schwitters in 1921 that he had given to his friends (Fig 39).

Schwitters collaborated with a Hannover craftsman to produce a series of inlaid wood boxes based on his collages. Various woods with different colors and grains approximate the pasted scraps of paper. Made to safeguard souvenirs and mementos, the boxes bear a similarity in shape to reliquary chasses—now empty and dedicated to significant people in his life. The initials inlaid into the box are those of Paul Erich Kuppers, president of a progressive Hanover-art association, and his wife, Sophie. After Paul's death in 1922, Sophie married the artist El Lissitzky and moved to his native Russia, where she eventually was imprisoned in a gulag, carrying with her the treasured box filled with mementos. (Bagnoli, Klein, Mann, Robinson, 2011)



Fig 39. Kurt Schwitters. Inlaid wooden box. 1921.

By coincidence I came across a gift to the writer and comedian Charlie Higson that was a handmade box from his wife for his 50th birthday (Fig 40). This box contained all his favourite objects collected over his life. Thinking of the power of objects I was reminded of a visit to the Foundlings Museum where (Fig 41-42):



**Vicky made me
this case for
my 50th birthday
- it's like a
museum of me**

writers and a little while later
we found we could give up
the decorating.

Creative gifts Many years
ago, pre-children, in the early
stages of our relationship,
I made Vicky some illustrated
books and little clay models to

Fig 40. Charlie Higson's present from his wife for his 50th birthday. 2011.



Fig 41 and 42 Foundling Museum buttons.

Some of the most poignant items in the Collection are the foundling tokens. These were pinned by mothers to their baby's clothes and upon entry, the Hospital would attach them to the child's record of admission. As foundling babies were given new names, these tokens helped ensure correct identification, should a parent ever return to claim their child. The children were not allowed to keep their tokens, which were frequently everyday objects, such as a coin or button. The Hospital gradually evolved a more sophisticated administrative system, whereby mothers were issued with receipts. So the practice of leaving tokens died out at the beginning of the nineteenth century. (Foundling Museum, 2010)

Objects we collect, objects we put value on, objects that acquire meaning over time are all very much part of my interest in what I make as an artist.

Another project that is on hold at the present time evolved from an invitation to exhibit three works in an exhibition opening at the Silas Marder gallery in New York in May 2012. The gallery always starts their summer programme by showing the works of 50 artists. Each artist makes 3, 8x10x1.5in canvases. I was asked to make the works in ceramic. This was technically a challenge because of the shrinkage issues with clay. The most challenging aspect of this project was deciding what images and ideas to work with. I felt the traditional format of a small box shape referenced painting so much, that my early attempts looked like poor imitations of paintings. I tried mock copies of abstract painting as the exhibition at the Silas Marder gallery is in the heartland of American abstract art. I also experimented with a piece inspired by Michael Landy's 1991 exhibition *Closing Down Sale* at Karsten Schubert gallery (Fig 43), as we are now in a similar economic downturn. These

initial experiments with a new form of ceramics felt unsuccessful and for a while I struggled with how to develop these works.



Fig 43. Experimental ceramic tile works for Silas Marder Gallery 2012.

I could not find a solution until I visited the Hajj exhibition at the British museum and saw a number of ceramic tiles depicting a map of the grand mosque in Mecca (Fig 44-45). I also visited the Grayson Perry exhibition *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* again as I had seen a dark green dish of a map of japan (Fig 46) and wanted to somehow combine the two works together.



Fig 44. Mecca Tiles. Turkish. 17th C. Victoria and Albert
61 x 38cm



Fig 45. Mecca Tiles. Turkish. 17th C. Benaki Museum, Athens.
73 x 49.5cm.



Fig 46. Japanese Dish. 1751-1850. British Museum.

While making these works I went on an artists residency project in March 2012 at Artoll in Germany. I went with the idea of responding to what I had seen at the British Museum but I was unsure how to proceed with the work for the Silas Marder gallery. I had recently read Johah Lehrer's (2012) book *Imagine: how creativity*

works. He looks at the latest research into individual acts of creativity, brain scanning, work environments and group creativity. He also looks at the idea of *conceptual blending* when you solve a problem by looking at it from a similar but different angle. I hoped that by not taking work already underway in the studio, I could contemplate the ongoing work from a different position and make new work while on the residency. The result of the residency was a series of photographic images (Fig 47) of carvings into trees. There was a visual beauty in how the text and image had become distorted and illegible, as the tree had grown. This reminded me of how I had used text in some of my plates, and what I enjoy about Christopher Wool's text works that play with the notion of interpretation and comprehension. As the trees were located on an old post road it meant that the carvings dated from as early as 1870. They also include a number from 1944 when fierce fighting took place in this area during the Second World War. It has now become a path through woodland for local residents. What I responded to in these carvings was the act of someone wanting to record an event in their lives on a surface that might probably outlive them. A modern day equivalent of a Neolithic handprint in a cave from 35,000yrs ago that seems to be saying '*I am here, I exist*' (Sennett, 2009, p. 130).



Fig 47. Detail View of photographic ink jet prints (19.5 x 25.5cm) for exhibition at Artoll, Germany .2012

The result of having time and space to reflect on the work for the Silas Marder gallery was that I could think about ideas of pilgrimage inspired by the Hajj and Grayson Perry exhibitions and I produced a number of ceramic maps of America (Fig 48). The USA was the country I first made a pilgrimage to, visiting there in 1978. I grew up thinking of the US as somewhere much more exciting than Manchester.

Soul music, the Grand Canyon, the Empire State building were all on my to do list of places to visit on my first self generated pilgrimage. There is also the experience of the event as memory; when I look at maps of America I am back in the remembered version of my experience.

Looking back at the experience on the arts residency in Germany I realise now that this duality of making work within another context yet holding a view on other works in progress highlights the importance of time and space both mentally and physically in my creative practice. I cannot short cut the time required to make, think and process within my practice. This has been one of the crucial lessons learnt on the doctorate and will inform the structures I put in place to make artworks in the future.

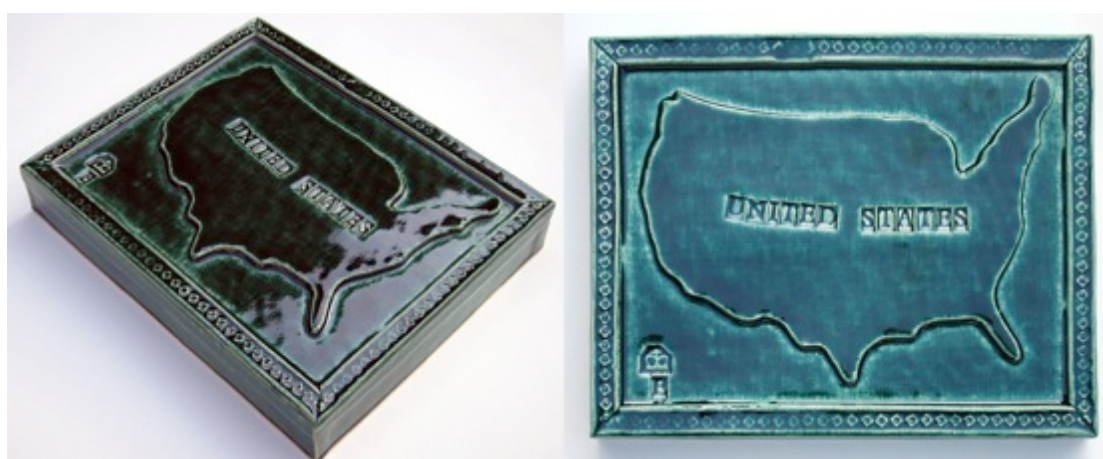


Fig 48. *United States Ceramic 19.5 x 25.5cm Maps* for Silas Marder Gallery. 2012.

I also made a group of slipware drawings of animals and flowers. I had had some success and some failures when working with slipware in the past and this was an attempt to pursue this way of working further. The animals and flowers (Fig 49) were inspired partly by Thomas Toft and arts and crafts ceramic wares. The results of these instinctive drawings from imagined birds and flowers were far better than I envisaged but I am unsure if I will develop them further. The maps I did take further during the summer of 2012 developing the idea of the Hajji tiles and using similar Victorian type glazes like the green map of Japan (Fig 46) or the glazes I saw on a restored town hall staircase in Cardiff (Fig 50). I also visited the Jerwood Gallery in Hastings which is covered externally with tiles and I may display future works as

hanging tiles. This is new work so as yet it is not fully realised aesthetically or conceptually.



Fig 49. Ceramic Slipware drawing 19.5 x 25.5cm, for Silas Marder Gallery. 2012.



Fig 50. Victorian Stairway Tiles. Cardiff.

At the start of the summer of 2012 my concerns were with commemorative objects, domestic objects, transitional objects and evocative objects. I started to visualise how the work was evolving as an exhibition. I imagined groups of plates together, feeding off one another both visually and conceptually. I wanted to bring this period of my practice together and to formulate a structure for the artworks as a group.

I first started developing a series of plates using Sunderland Pottery as the inspiration (*Fig 51*). Sunderland pottery was famed for its pink lustre that was applied liberally over the surface and then mottled with white spirit or thinner. Sunderland pottery also used black and white transfers as the main images on the plates, usually depicting sailors returning home or pictures of the Tyne Bridge.

My initial idea was to play around with ideas of Englishness as the content for the plates, but use the aesthetic of the Sunderland pottery. My first idea used photographs of a number of restaurants with English flags in their windows (*Fig 52*). I photographed these restaurants during a football world cup and was amazed at how each restaurant had England Flags prominently displayed in their windows. Again I want the viewer to be drawn in by the allure of a well-crafted object and then to find another reading within the images. I also changed the outside edge of the plates as the previous outside edge was a series of holes and this new experimental edge is pushed in, like a piecrust, with my thumb.

I reflected on a comment made by a fellow student, Lewis Paul, who said that he 'loved the indentations' I had made around a previous plate titled *Us and Them* (*Fig 53-54*) and the relationship to the glaze and holes rather than the image. It had, he said, an 'emotional resonance' for him and that 'the physical material within the works makes for beautiful moments to encounter'.



Fig 51. Sunderland Pottery Jug approx. 1850. Sunderland Museum



Fig 52.. Come on England Ceramic plate. 50 x 50cm 2012.

This lead me to research Richard Sennett's (2009) book *The Craftman*. Sennett states in his paragraph on Presence:

The maker leaves a personal mark of his or her presence on the object. In the history of craftsmanship, these maker's marks usually have carried no political message, as a graffito scrawled on a wall can, merely the statement anonymous laborers have imposed on inert materials, fecit: "I made this," "I am here, in this work," which is to say, "I exist." (Sennett, 2009, p. 130)

I have never thought of my maker's mark (Fig 55) as, 'I exist' and I wondered whether my finger print pie-crust edge might add a new layer of meaning to the work. The feedback I had was that it did look like a pie-crust but did not add to the reading positively.



Fig 53. *Us Them*, 2010.



Fig 54. *Us Them* (close up), 2010.



Fig 55. *My Makers Mark*.

One of my works in progress are a series of plates that I started when thinking about what events seem to have repeated themselves throughout my life, on a personal and cultural level (Fig 56). I started to think about historical headline themes such as wars, economics, violence, education and family. The idea of personal and national beliefs that underpins who we are as individuals and as a collective made me think about what I personally stand behind and what mistakes I repeat. I thought about the difficulty in describing thoughts and feelings with words and the need to develop language to describe myself, and about the psychoanalytical theories of introjections as the process where we take on behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, attributes or other fragments of the surrounding world. This reminded me of the

concept of *transitional spaces/phenomena* that was used by Donald Winnicott to describe the intermediate area of human experience between inner reality and the outside world.

Flags and coloured rings were such a dominant symbol in the Olympic summer of 2012 that visually I kept being drawn to that pictorial genre. These works are not yet completed and will eventually have photographs 'fired' on to the ceramics. I am anticipating completing them by May 2013. The photographic images will go over the white triangles on the plates, twenty four photographs in total that will include photographs of sites of personal pilgrimage, places lived and images from my family album.



Fig 56. Untitled. Work in progress - 2013.

I have also completed another series of works (Fig 57) that has its origins in the plate entitled, '*Us and Them*' made in 2010 (Fig 28. Appendix, page 99). '*Us and Them*' was a reaction to news items that seem to constantly highlight issues such as the conflict between supposed opposites such as West/East, Black/White, Muslim/Christian etc. Although each plate asks a different question the overriding content of the plates asks how do you see yourself, as an 'Us' or as 'Them'.

These plates use the chap-print inspired font as not only text to be read, but decoration in the design of the plate. I wanted to use this text to again echo folk art,

to look handmade, filling the object with pattern and decoration. I intended to create a tension or a clash between the initial engagement with the polished ceramic surface and image, and the legibility of the text. The non-confrontational crafted object revealing hidden, possibly darker secrets. I also used silver within the plates for its reflective qualities, hoping it would catch background light or a reflection of something moving behind the viewer.

The first plate in the series is, *No mans land* (Fig 26. Appendix, page 97). I made this plate in response to the sense of not knowing, or not understanding what is happening on a personal psychological level. A mental space of uncertainty or transition, a no mans land, where you are waiting or procrastinating about unresolved thoughts and feelings.

If it comes down to it (Fig 27. Appendix, page 98). As the Arab spring developed over 2011-12 I reflected on what I would do if I lived under an oppressive regime for 40 years, and found myself in a fight for survival. What would my limits of moral behaviour be, would I recognise myself in extreme circumstances of violence?

Us them (Fig 28. Appendix, page 99). This was the first plate I started in this series, in response to reflections about how I set up situations that marginalize the outsider, the other, what I do not understand. I used an old engraving of death by burning as the image. I wanted to draw the viewer in by disarming them with an image that is distressing but distant, not contemporary of their time, and then to encounter the text, shimmering, reflecting back: Us, them.

The other in you (Fig 29. Appendix, page 100). Started from reflections on how we do not always see ourselves clearly. The, 'other', could refer to unrecognised parts of ourselves. The *other* is a reference to outsiders, unknown and alien, but could also be what is psychologically unknown. The fighting man with his sword is pointing towards the man with a rifle on the other plate, old and new forms of warfare: old and new forms of awareness.



Fig 57. Five Ceramic Plates. 50 x 50 cm each. 2012.

Bottom to top. No mans land. If it comes down to it. Us them. The other in you. The presence of another man.

The presence of another man (Fig 30. Appendix, page 101) developed from thoughts about the hidden influences of other men in my life such as fathers, grandfathers and friends. How did my father leave his mark upon me? What as a son did I inherit and carry within me? This led me to ideas of inherited behaviours, attitudes, loves and beliefs that embed themselves within each of us. I had seen this image of the cowboy in a book on Russian criminal tattoos. It was an ambiguous image as it looked androgynous to me. The image of a man portrayed on the outside as a cowboy, and on the inside as possibly something different, a man more complicated than the surface reading.

Theory and Creative Practice – *Conclusion*

I wrote and taught a course in 2005 entitled the ‘Art Community Group’ that consisted of a group of staff and students from the University of East London. The course aimed to address the subject of what psychological structures support or sabotage our creativity. Yet it has taken the experience of the Doctorate Programme and the intense activity of making to reveal the realities that only appear through the physical act of doing. The creative act of making for me needs a transitional space that prioritises the incubation and transformation of ideas into objects.

Throughout the Doctorate Programme, the subject matter of the work has been inspired by my interest in psychotherapy which has allowed me to examine my personal beliefs, behaviours, thoughts and attitudes using theories such as projection, transference, introjections and transitional objects. These theories fascinate me as they mine the everyday and the familiar for deeper layers of meanings that can often lead to the uncovering of darker and less acceptable or unacknowledged parts of the psyche.

I have been able to explore my attraction to knick-knacks, keepsakes and ceramic commemorative wares. These domestic objects imbued with imagination and affection have been a constant visual stimulus to the work I have made during the Doctorate Programme.

My ambition being as Sherry Turkle says;

underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things
(Turkle, 2007, p. 5)

The structure of the doctorate programme has been invaluable, as it has nurtured my development; encouraging and eliciting new avenues of enquiry and research within my working methodologies. I have been able to create a report that is a record of my entire practice from my BA degree onwards. It has helped me to articulate my current practice over the past five years through the seminar programme and the range of feedback from Fine Art staff and fellow students. It has provided the opportunity for me to experience a range of different approaches to making and thinking through the work-in progress seminars and end of year showcase forums while providing an opportunity to speculate on the future.

It is these future opportunities created by my involvement on the doctorate programme that now excites me and has given me the prospect to answer new questions I have proposed for myself. Questions such as; What will I make next? What would my ideal scenario for the work look like in one years time and five years time? What do I need to put in place to capitalise and build on the momentum and learning from this experience? The pursuit of the answers to these questions will form the framework for the next chapter in my creative output.

Professional Practice - 2008-2013

Future Exhibitions

2014 Silas Marder Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York.
<http://www.silasmarder.com>

Group exhibitions

2013 April – June.. ‘One Way or Another II’, Group Exhibition, Space Gallery, Aberdeen. <http://www.wearesmartconsultants.co.uk/#!/gallery/>

2012 May - July. ‘Big Art Show 7’ – Group Exhibition, Silas Marder Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York. <http://www.silasmarder.com>

2012 Jan - Group Exhibition of ‘Work in Progress’ by Professional Doctorate Students, AVA Gallery, University of East London.

2011 June – August. ‘History of What’ – Group Exhibition, Silas Marder Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York. <http://www.silasmarder.com>

2011 June - Group Exhibition by Professional Doctorate Students, Fine Art Studios, University of East London. Seminar and Feedback with invited artist Alan Kane.

2011 Group Exhibition, Arthur M Berger Gallery, Manhattanville College, Westchester, New York. USA.

2010 Scope International Art Fair, Miami, USA.
I exhibited at the Miami Art Fair in December 2010 as part of a group of Artists represented by The Silas Marder Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York. USA. <http://www.scope-art.com/index.php/miami>

2010 Group Exhibition of ‘Work in Progress’ by Professional Doctorate Students in the AVA Gallery, University of East London. Feb 2010

- 2009 Group Exhibition of Professional Doctorate Students at the University of East London Fine Art Studios. June 2009.
- 2009-10 Group Exhibition called 'Home Sweet Home' at the Silas Marder Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York. Nov 09 – Jan 2010
- 2009-10 Group Exhibition called 'Mythical Lyrical' at the Sueli Turner Gallery, London. Nov 09 – Jan 2010.
- 2009 Group Exhibition called 'Pick and Mix' at Woolworths, Leytonstone, London. June 2009.

Residencies

2012, March – 'Richtkrafte' - A UEL funded Artists residency retreat at Artoll residency programme in Bedburgh-Hau, near Kleve in Germany. <http://www.artoll.de/> - The Project will be entitled "Richtkrafte 2012" 'Directional Forces". The title of the show is in reference to Joseph Beuys exhibition presented in Berlin in 1977. Beuys exhibition presented his iconic 'blackboard' artworks 'Richtkrafte (Directive Forces Of A New Society)' that resulted from the writings of the eminent educationalist and thinker Rudolf Steiner between 1974 and 1977.

Collections

Private collectors in the UK and USA

Conferences

2011, June – Attended the International conference entitled 'Imagining the Imagination' at the Royal College of Art.

Teaching

BA Printmaking within Art and Design at the University of East London.

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Appendix

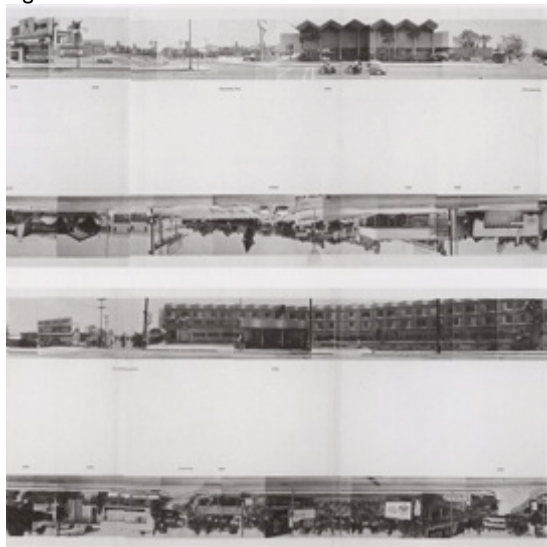
Fig1.



Joseph Kosuth *One and Three Chairs* 1965

Wooden folding chair, colour photograph of chair and photographic enlargement of dictionary definition of chair.

Fig 2.



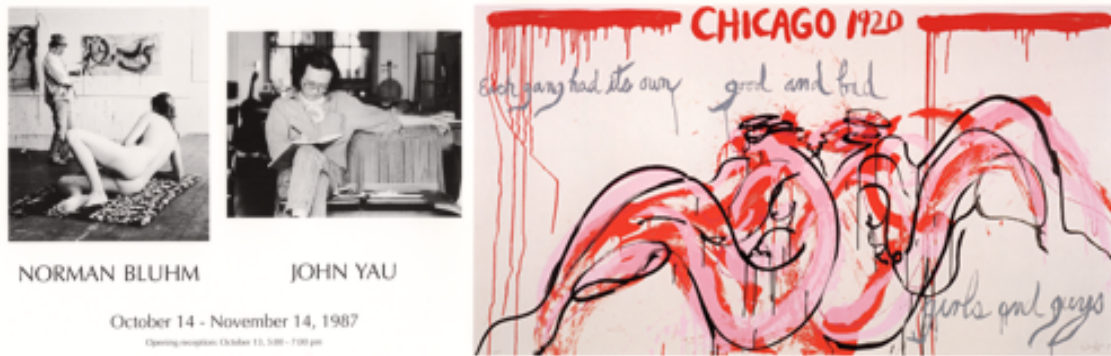
Ed Ruscha *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* 1966

Artists book, offset black and white photographs.

Fig 3.

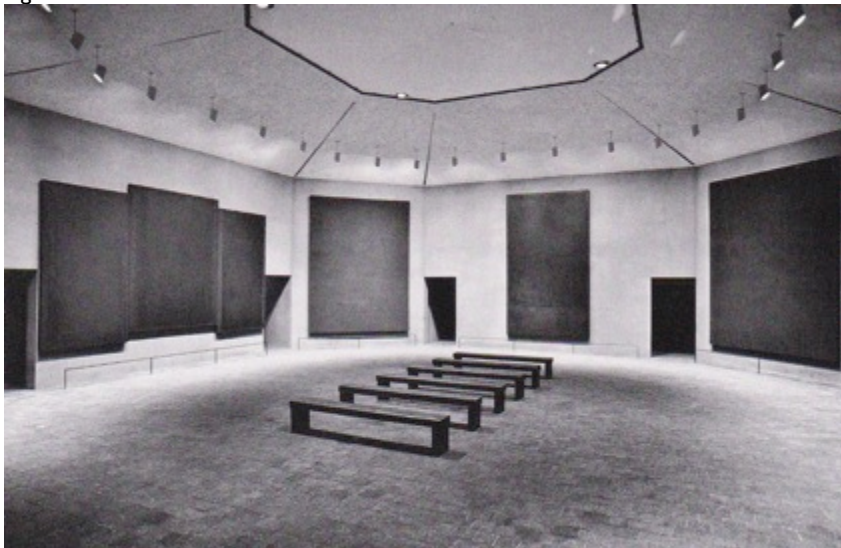


Archie Rand *Assimilation* 1988. Colour potato print, 50 x 75ins, Edition of 5. Published by Cone Editions.



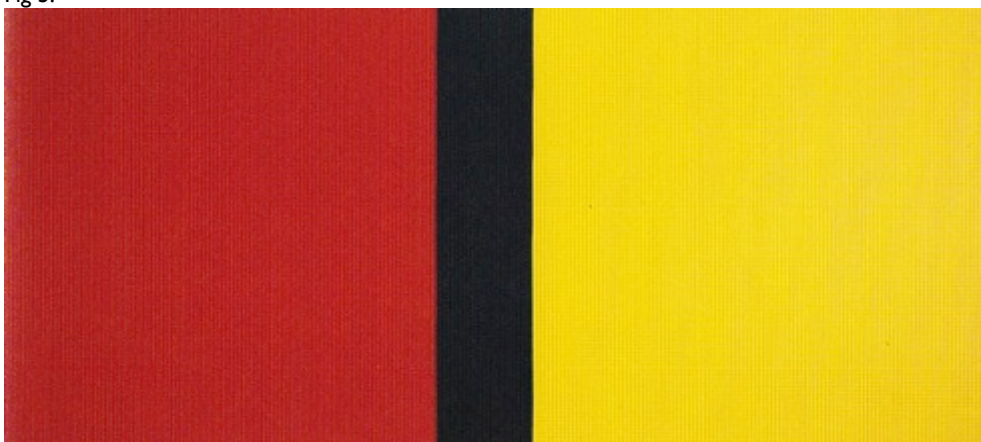
Norman Bluhm and John Yau *Chicago 1920*, 1987. Screenprint 40 x 75ins Edition of 35. Published by Cone Editions.

Fig 4.



Rothko Chapel. Houston Texas, 1974.

Fig 5.



Barnet Newman *Whos's Afriad of Red, Yellow and Blue IV*. 1969-70. Acrylic on canvas 108"x238"



Fig 6. *This is proper porn*. 50 x 50 cm. 2009.



Fig 7. *What is man.* 50 x 50 cm. 2009.



Fig 8. Love is really unpredictable. 50 x 50 cm. 2009.



Fig 9. *Being alone with your thoughts is no fun.* 50 x 50 cm. 2009.



Fig 10. *Home sweet home*. 50 x 50 cm. 2009.



Fig 11. *A story to believe in.* 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 12. *Love is really unpredictable*. 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 13. *If a bird lands on your head does it build a nest?* 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 14. *Love hot cold stale fresh betrayed denied.* 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 15. *Things are usual then happiness arrives.* 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 16. *They made me do it.* 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 17. *My cat knows what I'm thinking.* 50 x 50 cm. 2010.



Fig 18. *Feeling Invisible*. 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 19. *Being alone with your thoughts is no fun.* 50 x 50 cm. 2012.



Fig 20. *Optimistic outsider*. 50 x 50 cm. 2012.



Fig 21. *What is man?* 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 22. *It's about nothing*. 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 23. *There isn't any world but this one.* 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 24. *What have we learnt today.* 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 25. *The end*. 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 26. *No man's land*. 50 x 50 cm. 2010.



Fig 27. *If it comes down to it*. 50 x 50 cm. 2011.



Fig 28. *Us them*. 50 x 50 cm. 2010.



Fig 29. *The other in you*. 50 x 50 cm. 2012.



Fig 28. *The presence of another man*. 50 x 50 cm. 2011